

ANSWER

To the OBJECTIONS that are made by Ill or Ignorant Men, against those Pious and highly Useful Persons, who, out of a Love to God and their Neighbour, give Informations to Magistrates of the Breaches of the Laws against Prophaneness and Immorality, for the effecting of a National Reformation.

By a Minister of the Church of England.

ONE might be apt to think, that *Prophaneness* and *Vice* should find so little Encouragement in a Christian Nation, that the Objections that are made by bad Men to Christian, legal, and necessary Methods of Suppressing them, should scarcely deserve to be publicly answered; but, I doubt, our Corruption is so great, as makes the doing of this neither improper or unnecessary.

The Objections that have been made by such Persons as refuse their Assistance in bringing to Punishment Prophane and Immoral Persons, by the Magistrates Execution of the Laws made against them, are chiefly such as follow.

First, That they shall get the Name of *Informers* by so doing, which is thought *scandalous* and *reproachful* by many People. To this I beg leave to reply, that they don't think the Name reproachful when their worldly Interest is concerned. He who informs of Theft or Robbery is thought well of: And 'tis esteem'd no Disgrace to be an Informer and Prosecutor in such Matters. And is there the least reason that it should be thought so where the Cause of God and Religion is concern'd? Shall it be thought scandalous by any but profligate Persons to inform against, and prosecute those who

are guilty of prophane *Swearing* and *Cursing*, breaking the *Sabbath*, *Drunkennes*, &c. when it is not thought so, but commendable, to inform of Theft, Murther, &c. Besides, the publick Authority has declared *Swearers*, *Drunkards*, *Lewd Persons*, &c. to be a Scandal to our Profession. And pray then consider, whether 'tis not honourable to *appear* against them. If there were any base Ends aim'd at in these Informations, they might indeed be reputed scandalous. But when, on the contrary, there is nothing design'd but the Glory of God, and the Good of our Brethren, Can any one that carries the Face of a Christian think 'it scandalous' to be an *Informer*? It is in truth, a very honourable thing thus to appear in the behalf of God and Religion, by endeavouring to keep up the Honour due to both, promoting a most useful Reformation, and thereby preventing God's Judgments being executed on us.

We should indeed be glad if Men would be prevail'd with by the Methods of Argument and Perswasion to have a greater Veneration for Almighty God, and a juster regard for his Laws. But since these Methods fail, we are thankful to the Civil Government for enforcing them by legal Penalties, that so they who will

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Not be influenced by the Fear of an Invisible Power, may by that of a Visible one. And we think our selves obliged to make use of the Means that the Laws direct, and the Government countenances for the Suppressing of *Prophaneness* and *Vices*; since all Laws are useless and insignificant if they be not put in Execution; and how can they be executed, if the Breaches of them be not inform'd against? Nay, we should think our selves utterly inexcusable, as being false to our God, by neglecting his Honour, and not doing our Duty to our Country, if we did not endeavour the Execution of those Laws which are made to put a stop to these Practices, which tend to ruine it.

But 'tis said by some, That the World is so bad, and evil Men so resolute, that there is little Hope to do much good this way. Men may make a Disturbance among their Neighbours, and get their ill Will, and perhaps meet with ill Treatment, but the World is not like to be very much mended by any of these Methods.

This is indeed spoken like those who do not care whether the World is mended or not, but whose Principle it is, to let it go as it will. But it becomes us to enquire, whether to be thus unconcern'd about our great Master's Will and Honour, be to act like a Christian, who is to be the *Light of the World*, and the *Salt of the Earth*, and to go about doing Good. We must indeed expect to meet with some Opposition, but our Lord himself bore the Contradiction of Sinners, and we need not think it hard to suffer what he himself was pleased to undergo. We have great reason to think, that Men will be wrought on by these Endeavours of ours. The present Shame and Punishment is very apt to raise in them serious Thoughts, and to bring them to Consideration, as we know it has done to many since these Methods have been used. And supposing that many of the Persons we inform against are not really mended in their Hearts, but do only outwardly abstain from being publicly prophane and Immoral, yet even by this means we do Honour to our Profession, by shewing how much it discountenances such Practices; and we keep Men from publicly dishonouring it, who do as it were bid an open Defiance to God and his Laws, and we may prevent National Judgments. It is a great Service to Religion to Suppress publick Sins which so greatly affront it.

We may indeed be somewh at injured in our *Worldly Business*; but shall we prefer a *smar Temporal Interest* to the Honour of God? Shall we be contented to see his Religion abus'd, his Authority defied, and his Laws disregarded, for Fear of losing some little *Temporal Gain* by it? To set such a Value on the things of this Life may be *Worldly Prudence*; But where is our Christianity all the while; which teaches us not only to leave Houses and Lands, but to be content to lay down our Lives for the sake of Christ and his Gospel? which those are not very likely to do, who can contentedly hear the Name of God Blasphem'd, and not take the least notice of it; and see his Laws broken, without being so much concern'd as to inform against it.

But 'tis objected farther, That to meddle in these things, and to endeavour a *Reformation of Manners*, is what does not belong to us, and is therefore *Pragmaticalness* in us.

What times do we live in! when 'tis thought to be acting the busy-body to meddle in that which ought to be the dearest to us of all things in the World, viz. the cause of God and Religion. Are we not yet sensible of the great Mischief that is done, and of the horrid and notorious Scandals which are brought on our most Holy Profession by that Impiety which is so general amongst us? Are we not yet convinced of the eminent Danger we are in by our many Provocations of the most High? If we were, we should not surely think it pragmatical to endeavour to put a stop to the Current of Vice and Prophaneness, which gives so much Scandal, and brings us into so much danger. We should then think as much *Pragmaticalness* to endeavour to quench a raging Fire, or put a stop to the Infection of some contagious Distemper. The Honour of God is what as Men and as Christians we are bound to maintain. We cannot, when that is concern'd, remain indifferent, and keep our Innocence at the same time. We must not then be affrighted from doing our Duty on the account of being thought forward and busy.

'Tis a good Observation of one, That that Man has his Religion hanging very loose about him that will be rallied and jeered out of it.

The last Objection that I've met with, that by punishing those who frequent Publick Houses at Unlawful Times, and suppressing Disorderly Houses,

Houses, the Queen's Revenue will be lessened, is scarce worth answering, since besides that 'tis an Affront to her Majesty to say, That she would have her Revenues encreased by the Sins of her People, 'tis certain, that the Multitude of *Ale-Houses* impoverishes many more than it enriches. May not the Encrease of our Poor be in some measure ascribed to the Encrease of *Ale-Houses* within these few Years? And who will deny, that where the Subjects of a Kingdom are Poor, there the Revenues will not be great.

On the whole, I would beg all who read this Paper to consider, whether as the Sworn Servants of God they are not obliged to vindicate his Honour; whether they ought not as Christians to endeavour the Salvation of all Men; and whether as Subjects of the State in which they live, they are not obliged to obey its Injunctions. And then to reflect, whether by refusing to appear in the Cause of God and Religion, and to act as if we had no Concern on us for our Brethren, and to excuse our selves from putting in Execution the Laws which are made to secure that respect which we ought to pay to God and his Laws, be not to renounce these Obligations, and to act contrary to them. If it be, *you* are surely to be blamed, and not *they* who take care to act answerable to those Obligations which they are under. The truth on't is, we have been generally scandalously remiss and negligent in this Matter. Had but the Professors of Religion expressed the same Zeal and Concern, and been as forward to appear for it, as the Enemies of it have been to appear against it, I dare say, *Vice* and *Impiety* had not risen to such an height. God be thanked we have the Laws of the Land on our side, and have now *Societies of Persons* in most Parts of the Nation, who have shown the World a Zeal in promoting the Execution of them, and have had therein great Success; and had

we generally but as much Courage in those things which concern God and Religion, as in those which concern our selves, we should not see so many appear so publickly against them, and might still hope to see happy Days. But indeed 'tis a certain sign of the greatness of our Degeneracy and Corruption, when so great a Clamour is rais'd against the *Attempts* of a Reformation of these Enormities, and no more are willing to join in them. *Religion* has been treated as her Master was, in being crucified between her open Enemies and her false Friends. But I hope, for the time to come, the Friends of *Piety* and *Goodness* will have a little more Courage and Resolution, so as not to be afraid to appear against those who bid Defiance to them, by breaking through the Bounds of all that's *Sacred, Civil, and Decent*; that the *Ministers of the Gospel* will put Men, and especially such as have *Oaths* and *Trusts* upon them in these Matters, in mind of their Duty herein. For to be ashamed in this Case is highly Criminal and indecent. To permit the Name of GOD, whom we are bound by the most sacred Ties to treat with the utmost Honour and Respect, to be vilified and prophaned, is at once to Reproach the Publick and our selves. 'Tis an odious Scandal to Christianity, and what causes the Revilings of its Enemies, to permit God's Laws not only to be neglected, but to be openly affronted, when 'tis easily in our Power to prevent. And we bring great Odium on our selves to refuse to appear, when there is Occasion, on the behalf of what we profess the greatest regard for.

May we all then be inspired with such a Zeal for the Honour of God and Religion, and the Salvation of others, as to take all Opportunities to advance them, that those Judgments may not fall upon us which are threatened to be inflicted on a *People Encouraging and Practising Impiety*.

See the Arch Bishop of Canterbury's late Circular Letter, with the concurring Letters of all the Bishops of that Province, for Persons frequently Meeting and Uniting in the Work of Reformation, and for their Obligation to give Informations to Magistrates of the Breaches of the Laws against Prophaneness and Immorality, pag. 4, 6. And the Account of the Societies for Reformation of Manners in England and Ireland, p. 13, 14, 15, 16, 58, 59.

A Help to a National Reformation. Printed for the Ease of Magistrates, Ministers, &c.

An Account of the Progress of the Reformation of Manners in *England, Scotland, and Ireland*, and other parts of *Europe* and *America*. To which is added the Special Obligations of Magistrates to be diligent in the Execution of the Laws against *Prophaneness* and *Vice*. Translated into the *Latin, French, and Dutch* Languages. *The Thirteenth Edition.*

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